THE SON THAT WAS DEAD—

Another Scattergood Baines Story

—By Clarence Budington Kelland

"THE ox is dressed and hung," said Pliney Pickett with the air of a man announcing that the country has been saved from destruction.

"Oh! How much'd be dress?" asked Scattergood Baines, moving in his especially reinforced armchair until it creaked its protest.

"Eight hunder and forty-three, according to Newt Patterson's scales."

"Which hain't never been knowed to err on the side of overweight," said Scattergood dryly.

"The boys has got the oven fixed for roastin' him, and the band gits on the mornin' train, failin' accidents, and the dec'rations is up in the taown hall, 'n' now we kin git ready for a week of stiddy rain."

"They's wuss things than rain," said Scattergood, "though at the minnit I don't call to mind what they be."

"Deacon Pettybone's north mowin' is turned into a base ball grounds, and everybody in town is buyin' buntin' to wrap their harnesses, and Ketteman's fetched in more'n five bushels of peanuts, and every young man in taown'll be sick with the stummick ache."

"Feelin' extry cheerful this mornin', hain't ye? Kind of more hopeful-like than I call to mind seein' you fer some time."

"Never knowed no big celebration to come off like it was planned, or thout somebody gittin' a leg busted, or the big speaker fergittin' what day it was or suthin'. Seems like the hull weight of this here falls right on to me."

"Responsibility," said Scattergood, with a twinkle in his eye, "is a turrible thing to bear up under. But nothin' hain't happened yit, and folks is dependin' on you, Pliny, to see't nothin' mars the party."

"It'll rain on to the pe-rade, and the ball game'll bust up in a fight, and pickpockets'll most likely git wind of sich a big gatherin' and come swarmin' in. Scattergood"—he lowered his voice impressively—"it's rumored Mavin Newton's a-comin' back for this here old home week."

"Uh—Mavin Newton. Um! Who up and la'nched that rumor?"

"Everybody's a-talkin' it up. Folks says he's sure to come, and then what in tunket'll we do? The sheriff's goin' to be busy handlin' the crowds and the traffic and sich, and he won't have no time fer extry miscreants, seems as though. Folks is a-comin' from as fur's Denver, and we don't want no town criminal brought to justice in the middle of it all. Though Mavin's father'd be glad to see his son ketched, I calc'late."

"Hain't interviewed Mattie Strong as ree-gards her feelin's, have ye?"

"I wonder," said Pliny, with intense interest, "if Mattie's ever heard from him. But she's that close-mouthed."

"'Tain't a common failin' hereabouts," said Scattergood. "How long since Mavin run off?"

"Eight year, come November."

"The night before him and Mattie was goin' to be married?"

"Uh-huh! Takin' with him that there fund the Congo Church raised fer a new organ, and it's took them eight year to raise it over ag'in."

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"AND in the meantime," said Scattergood, "I calc'late the tunes off of the old organ has riz about as pleasin' to heaven as if 'twas new. Squeaks some, I'm told, but I figger the squeaks gits kind of filtered out, an' nothin' but the true meanin' of the tunes ever gits up to Him." Scattergood jerked a pudgy thumb skyward.

"More'n two hundred dollars, it was—and Mavin treasurer of the church. Old Man Newton he resigned as elder, an' hain't never set foot in church from that day to this."

"Doin' moved," said Scattergood, "more by cantankerousness than grief."

"I'll venture that there'll be more'n five hundred old residents a-comin' back," said Pliny, "and' where in tunket we're goin' to sleep 'em all the committee don't know."

"Um! G'bye Pliny," said Scattergood suddenly. And Pliny, recognizing the old hardware merchant's customary and inescapable dismissal, got up off the step and cut across diagonally to the post office, where he could air his importance as a committeeman before an assemblage as ready to discuss the events of the week as he was himself.

It was a momentous occasion in the life of Coldriver—a gathering of prodigals and wanderers under home roofs, a week set aside for the return of sons and daughters and grandchildren of Coldriver who had ventured forth into the world to woo fortune and to seek adventure. Preparations had been in the making for months, and the village was resolved that its collateral relatives to the remotest generation should be made aware that Coldriver was not deficient in the necessary "git up and git" to wear down its visitors to the last point of exhaustion. Pliny Pickett, chairman of numerous committees and marshal of the parade, predicted it would "lay over" the centennial in Philadelphia.

The greased pig was to be greasier, the barbecued ox was to be larger, the band was to be nosier, the speeches were to be longer and more tiresome, the firemen's races and the ball games, and the fat men's race, and the frog race, and the grand ball, with its quadrilles and Virginia reels, and "Hull's Victory" and "Lady Washington's reel," and its "Portland fancy"—were all to be just a little superior to anything of the sort ever attempted in the state. Numerous septuagenarians were resorting to St. Jacob's oil and surreptitiously prancing in the barn to "scoople" up their legs for the dance. It was to be one of those wholesome, generous, splendid outpourings of neighborliness and good-feeling and wonderful simplicity and kindliness such as one can meet with nowhere but in the remoter mountain communities of old New England, where customs do not grow stale and no innovation mars. If any man would discover the deep meaning of the word "welcome," let him attend such a home-coming!

Though Coldriver did not realize it, the impetus toward the home-coming week had been given by Scattergood Baines.

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SCATTERGOOD went inside the store and leaned upon the counter, taking no small pleasure in a mental inventory of his heterogeneous stock. He had completed one side and arrived at the rear, given over to stoves and garden tools, when a customer entered. Scattergood turned.

"Mornin', Mattie," he said. "What [illegible] yer to this time?"

[illegible] need a jack hammer, Mr.

"Got three kinds—plain with claws and them patent ones that picks up tacks by electricity. I hold by them and kin recommend 'em high."

"I'll take one, then," said Mattie. But after Scattergood wrapped it up and gave her change for her dollar bill, she remained, hesitating, uncertain, embarrassed.

"Was they suthin' besides a tack hammer you wanted, Mattie?" Scattergood asked gently.

"I—no nothing." Her courage had failed her, and she moved toward the door.

"Mattie!"

She stopped.

"Jest a minute," said Scattergood. "Never walk off with suthin' on your mind—apt to give ye mental cramps. What was that there tack hammer an excuse for comin' here fer?"

"Is it true that he's coming back, like the talk's goin' around "

"I calc'late ye mean Mavin. Mean Mavin Newton?"

"Yes," she said faintly.

"What if he did?" said Scattergood. "I don't know—oh, I don't know!"

"Want he should come back?"

"He—if he should come——"

"Uh-huh," said Scattergood. "Calc'late I kin appreciate your feelin's. Treated you mighty bad, didn't he?"

"He treated himself worse," said Mattie, with a little awakening of sharpness.

"So he done—so he done! Um—eight year he's been gone, and you was twenty when he went, wasn't ye? Twenty?"

"Yes."

"Hain't never had a feller since?"

She shook her head.

"I'm an old maid, Mr. Baines."

"I've heard tell of older," he said dryly. "Wisht you'd tell me why you let sich a scalawag up and ruin your life fer ye."

"He wasn't a scalawag—till then."

"You hain't thinkin' he was accused of suthin' he didn't do?"

"He told me he took the money. He came to see me before he ran away."

"Do tell!" This was news to Scattergood. Neither he nor any other was aware that Mavin Newton had seen or been seen by a soul after the commission of his crime.

"He told me," she repeated, "and he said gooy-bye—but he never told me why. That's what's been hurtin' me and troublin' me all these years. He didn't tell me why he done it, and I hain't ever been able to figger it out."

"Um! Why he done it? Never occurred to me."

"It never occurred to anybody. All they saw was that he took their organ money and robbed the church. But why did he do it? Folks don't do them things without reason, Mr. Baines."

"He wouldn't tell you?"

"I asked him, and I asked him to take me along with him! I'd a-gone gladly, and folks could'a thought what they liked! But he wouldn't tell, and he wouldn't have me—and I hain't heard a word from him from that day to this. But I've thought and figgered and figgered and thought—and I jest can't see no reason at all."

"Took it to run away with—fer expenses," said Scattergood.

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"THERE wasn't anything to run away from until after he took it. I know!. Whatever 'twas, it come on him suddin. The night before we was together—and—and he didn't have nothin' on his mind but plans for him and me. And he was that happy, Mr. Baines! I wisht I could make out what turned a good man into a thief—all in a minute, as you might say. It's suthin', Mr. Baines—suthin' out of the ordinary, and always I got a feelin' like I got a right to know."

"Yes," said Scattergood, "seems as though you had a right to know."

"Folks is passin' it about that he's comin' home. Is there any truth into it?"

"I calc'late it's jest talk," said Scattergood. "Nobody knows where he is."

"He'll come some time," she said.

"And you calc'late to keep on waitin' fer him to come?"

"Until I'm dead—and after that, if it's allowed."

"I wisht there was suthin' I could do to mend it all," said Scattergood.

"Nobody kin ever do anythin'," she said. "But if he should venture back, calc'latin' it had all blown over and been forgot! His father'd see him put in prison—and I—I couldn't bear that, it seems as though——"

"There's a bad thing about borrowin', trouble," said Scattergood. "No matter how hard you try, you can't ever pay it back. Wait till he croaks, and then do your worryin'."

"I've got a feelin' he's goin' to come," she said, and turned away, wearily. "I thought maybe you'd know. That's why I came in, Mr. Baines."

"G'-bye, Mattie—g'-bye. Come ag'in when you feel that way—and you need't to buy no tack hammer for an excuse."

Scattergood slumped down in his chair on the store's piazza and began pulling his round cheeks as if he had taken up with some new method of massage. It was a sign of inward disturbance. Presently a hand stole downward to the laces of his shoes—a gesture purely automatic—and in a moment, to the accompaniment of a sigh of relief, his broad feet were released from bondage and his liberty-loving toes were wriggling with delight. Any resident of Coldriver passing at that moment could have told you Scattergood Baines was wrestling with some grave difficulty.

"It stands to reason," said he to himself, "that ever'body has a reason for ever'thing, except lunatics—and lunatics think they got a reason. Now, Mavin, he wasn't no lunatic. He wouldn't have stole church money and run off the night before his weddin' jest to exercise his feet. They hain't no reason, as I recall it, why he needed two hundred dollars—unless it was to git married on. And instid of that, it busted up the weddin'. I calc'late that matter wan't looked into sharp enough. And eight years has gone by. Lots of grass grows up to cover old paths in eight year."

A small boy was passing at the moment, giving an imitation of a cowboy pursuing Indians. Scattergood called to him.

"Hey, bub! Scurry around and see if ye kin find Marvin Preston. Uh-huh! 'F ye see him, tell him I'm a-settin' here on the piazza."

The small boy dug his toes into the dust and disappeared up the street. Presently Marvin Preston appeared in answer to the indirect summons.

"How be ye, Marvin? Stock doin' well?"

"Fust class. See the critter they're figgerin' on barbecuin'? He's a sample."

"Um! Lived here quite a spell, hain't you, Marvin—quite a spell?"

"Born here, Scattergood."

"Know lots of folks, don't ye? Got acquainted consid'able in town and the surroundin' country?"

"A feller 'u'd be apt to in fifty-five year."

"Call to mind the Megges that used to live here?"

"Place next to the Newton farm—recollect 'em well."

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"LIVED next to ol' man Newton, eh? Forgot that." Scattergood had not forgotten it, but quite the contrary. His interest in the Meggses was negligible. His purpose in mentioning them was to approach the Newtons circuitously and by stealth, as he always approached affairs of importance to him.

"Know 'em well? Know 'em as well's you knowed the Newtons."

"Not by no means. I've knowed ol' man Newton better'n most anybody, seems as though."

"Um! Le's see—had a son, didn't he?"

"Run off with the organ money," said Marvin shortly.

"Remember suthin' about him. Quite a while back."

"Eight year. Allus recall the date on account of sellin' a Holstein heifer to Avery Sutphin the mornin' follerin' —fer cash."

"Him that was dep'ty sheriff?"

"That's the feller."

"Um! Ever git a notion what young Mavin up and stole that money fer?"

"Inborn cussedness, I calc'late."

"Allus seemed to me like ol' man Newton might-a made restitution of that there money," said Scattergood, tentatively.

"H'm!" Marvin cleared his throat and glanced up the street. "Seein's how it's you, I dunno but what I kin tell you suthin' you hain't heard nor nobody else. Young Mavin sent that there money back to his father in a letter to be give to the church and the ol' man burned it! That's what he up and done. Two hundred good dollars went up in smoke! Said they was crimes that was beyond restitution or forgiveness, and robbin' the house of God was one of 'em."

"Um! Now, Marvin, I'd be mighty curious to learn if the ol' man got that information from God himself or if it come out of his own head. No matter, I calc'late. 'Twan't credit with the church young Mavin was after when he sent back the money—and the Lord, he knows the money come, if the organ fund never did find it out."

"Guess I'll take a walk down to Spackles' and look over the steer. They tell me he dressed clost to nine hundred. Hope they contrive to cook him through and through. Never see a barbecued critter yit that was done. Folks is beginnin' to git here. Guess they won't be a spare bedroom in town that hain't full up."

Scattergood pulled on his shoes, and, leaving his store to take care of itself, walked up the road, turned across the mowing which had been metamorphosed into an athletic field, trusted his weight to the temporary bridge across the brook, scrambled up the bank to the great oven where the steer was to be baked, and where the potato hole was ready to receive twenty bushels of potatoes and the arch was ready to receive the sugar vat in which two thousand ears of corn were to be steamed. Pliny Pickett was in charge, with Ulysses Watts, sheriff, and Coroner Bogle as assistants. They had fired up already and were sitting blissfully by in the blistering heat, bragging about the sort of meal they were going to purvey, and speculating on whether the imported band would play enough and how the ball games would come out and naming over the folks who were expected to arrive from distant parts.

"This here town team hain't what it was ten year ago," said the sheriff. "In them days the boys knowed how to play ball. There was me'n Will Pratt and Pliny here, 'n' Avery Sutphin, that was sheriff 'fore I was."

"What ever become of Avery?" Pliny asked.

"Went west. Heard suthin' about him a spell back, but don't call to mind what it was. Wonder if he'll be comin' back with the rest?"

"Dunno. Think there's anything in the rumor that Mavin Newton's comin'?"

"Hope not," said the sheriff, assuming an official look and feeling of the suspender to which was affixed his badge of office. "Don't want to have no arrestin' to do durin' old home week."

"Calc'late to take him in if he comes?"

"Duty is duty," said Sheriff Watts.

"When it hain't a pleasure," said Scattergood. "Recall what place Avery Sutphin went to?"

"Seems like it was Oswego. Some'eres out west like that."

"Wisht all the town 'u'd quit traipsin' over here," said Pliny. "Never see sich curiosity. They needn't to think they're goin' to git a look at the critter while he's a-cookin'. No, siree! Nobody but this here committee sees him till he's took out final, ready fer eatin'."

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ALL that day visitors arrived in town. They drove in, came by train and by stage—and walked. There was no house whose ready hospitality was not taxed to its capacity, and the ladies in charge of the restaurant in Masonic Hall became frantic and sent out hysterical messengers for more food and more help. Every house was dressed in flags and bunting. Even Deacon Pettybone, reputed to be the "nearest" inhabitant of the village, flew one small cotton flag, reputed to have cost fifteen cents, from his front stoop. The bridge was so covered with red, white and blue as to quite lose its identity as a bridge and to become one of the wonders of the world, to be talked about for a decade. As one looked up the street, a similarity of motion, almost machine-like, was apparent. It was an endless shaking of hands as old friend met old friend joyously.

"Bet ye don't know who I be?"

"I'd a-know'd you in Chiny. You're Mort Whittaker's wife—her that was Ida James. Hair hain't so red as what it was."

"You've took on flesh some, but otherwise——. Member the time you took me to the dance at Tupper Falls?"

"An we got mired crossin'——"

"An' Sam Kettleman come in a plug hat?"

This conversation, or its counterpart, was repeated wherever resident and visitor met. Old days lived again. Ancient men became middle-aged and middle-aged women became girls. The past was brought to life a bit tediously, as when old Jethro Hammond, postmaster of Coldriver twenty years ago, made a speech seventy minutes long, which consisted in naming and locating every house that existed in his day and describing with minute detail who lived in it and what part they played in the affairs of the community. But the audience forgave him, because it knew what a good time he was having. Houses were invaded by perfect strangers who insisted in pointing out the rooms in which they were born and in which they had been married, and in telling the present proprietors how fortunate they were to live in dwellings thus blassed.

The band arrived and met with universal satisfaction, though Lafe Atwell complained that he hadn't ever seen a snare drummer with whiskers. But their coats were red, with gorgeous frogs, and their trousers were sky blue, with gold stripes; and the drum major could whirl his baton in a manner every boy in town would be imitating with the handle of the ancestral broom for months to come. Through it all Scattergood Baines sat on the piazza and beamed upon the world and rejoiced in the goodness thereof.

Only one resident took no part in the holiday making, and that was old man Newton, who had closed his house, drawn the blinds, and refused to make himself visible while the celebration lasted. He took a savage pleasure in thus making himself conspicuous, knowing well how his conduct would be discussed, and viewing himself as a righteous man suffering for the sins of another.

In the darkness of the evening street Mattie Strong accosted Scattergood, clinging to his arm tremulously.

"Mr. Baines," she whispered affrightedly, "he's come!"

"Who's come?"

"Mavin Newton. He's here in town."

Scattered frowned. "See him?"

"Hain't seen him—but he's here. I kin feel him. I knowed it the minute he come."

"Calc'late I've seen everybody here, and I hain't seen him."

"He's here, jest the same. I'm a-lookin' fer him. Whatever name he come under, or however he looks, I'll know him. I couldn't make no mistake about Mavin."

"Mattie, I hope 'tain't so—I hope you're mistook."

"I—I don't know whether I hope so or not. I—oh, Mr. Baines, I'd rather be with him, a-comfortin' him and standin' by him, no matter what he done."

Scattergood patted her arm. "I calc'late," he said softly, "that God hain't never invented no institution that beats the love of a good woman. I'll look around, Mattie—I'll look around."

It was the next morning at the ball game when Mattie spoke to Scattergood again.

"I've seen him," she whispered, and there was a note of happiness in her voice and a look of renewed youth in her eyes. "He's here—like I said."

"Where?"

Mattie lowered her voice farther still. "Look at the band," she said.

"Nobody resembles him there," said Scattergood after a minute.

"Wait till they stop playin', and then see if they hain't somebody there that takes holt of the fingers of his right hand, one after the other, and kind of twists 'em. Look sharp! Mavin, he allus done that when he was nervous—allus. I'd know him by it anywheres."

Scattergood watched. Presently the "piece" ended, and the musicians laid down their instruments and eased back in their chairs.

"Look!" said Mattie.

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THE bearded snare drummer was performing a queer antic. It was as if his fingers were screwed into his hand and had become loosened while he drummed. No, he was tightening them so they wouldn't fall off. One finger after another he screwed up, and then went over them again to make certain they were secure.

"I—knowed he'd come," Mattie said happily.

"Um! This here's kind of untoward. You keep your mouth shet, Mattie Strong. Don't you go near that feller till I tell you. We don't want a rumpus to spoil this here week."

"But he's here—he's here!"

"So's trouble!" said Scattergood succinctly.

The rest of that day Scattergood busied himself in searching out old friends and neighbors of the Newtons. Nothing seemed to interest him which happened later than eight years before, but no event of that period was too slight or inconsequential to receive his attention and to be filed away in his shrewd old brain. He was looking for the answer to a question, and the answer was piled under the rubbish of eight years of human activities—a hopeless quest to any but Scattergood.

Comedy and tragedy were alike interesting to him. Just as he lost no detail of the old man's conduct when his boy disappeared, so he listened and laughed when Martin Banks recalled to a group how old man Newton had fallen under the suspicion of bootlegging, and how the town had seethed with the downfall of an elder of the church—and all because the old man had imported two cases, each of a dozen bottles, of the Siwash Indian stomach bitters, recommended to cure his dyspepsia. There had been a moment, said Banks, when the town expected to see Newton shut up in the calaboose under the post office—until the true contents of those cases were revealed.

During the afternoon Scattergood sent six telegrams to as many different cities. Late that night he received replies and sent one long message to an individual high in office in the state. It was an urgent message, amounting to a command, for in his own commonwealth Scattergood Baines was able to command when the need required.

"It's an off chance," he said to himself, "but it's what might a-happened, and if it might a-happened, maybe it did happen."

Wednesday afternoon the band was thrown into consternation and the town into a paroxysm of excitement and speculation when Sheriff Watts ascended the platform of the musicians and, placing a heavy hand on the shoulder of the snare drummer, said loudly, "Mavin Newton, I arrest ye in the name of the law!"

Not a soul in that breathless crowd was there who failed to see Mattie Strong point her finger in the face of Scattergood Baines and to hear her utter one word, "Shame!" Nor did any fail to see her take her place at the side of the bearded drummer, with her fingers clutching his arm, and walk to the door of the jail under the post office with the prisoner.

Then the word was passed about that the hearing would take place before Justice of the Peace Bender that very evening. So great was the public clamor that the justice agreed to hold court in the town hall instead of in his office, and it was rumored that Johnnie Bones, Scattergood Baines' own lawyer, had been appointed special prosecutor by the governor of the state.

Opinion ran against Scattergood. It was free and outspoken. Townsfolk and visitors alike felt that Scattergood had done ill in bringing the young man to justice, especially at such a time. He should have let sleeping dogs lie. And when it heard that Sheriff Watts had carried a subpoena to Mavin Newton's father, compelling his presence as a witness against his own son, there arose a wind of disapproval which quite swept Scattergood from the esteem of the community.

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BUT the town came to the hearing. In the beginning it was a cut-and-dried affair. The facts of the crime were established with dry precision. Then Johnnie Bones called the name of a witness, and the audience stiffened to attention. Even old man Newton, sitting with bowed head and scowling brow, lifted his eyes to the face of the young lawyer.

"Avery Sutphin," said Johnnie Bones, and the former sheriff, wearing such a haircut as Coldriver seldom saw within its corporate limits and clothed in such clothing as it had never seen there, was brought through the door by two strangers of official look. He seated himself in the witness chair.

"You are Avery Sutphin, former sheriff of this town?"

"Yes."

"Where do you reside?"

"In the state penitentiary," said Avery, seeking to hide his face.

"Do you know Mavin Newton?"

"Yes."

"When did you last see him?"

"It was the night of June 12, eight years ago."

"Where?"

"In his father's barn."

"What was he doing?"

"Milkin'," said Avery.

"You went to see him?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"To git some money out of him"

"Did he owe you money?"

"No."

"How much money did you go to get?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Did you get it?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what money it was?"

"Church organ money. He told me."

"Why did he give it to you?"

"I made him."

"How?"

"Lemme tell it my own way—if I got to tell it. He'd took my girl, and I never liked him, anyhow. There'd been rumors his old man was bootleggin'. Nothing to it, of course, and I knowed that. And I needed some money. Bought a beef critter off'n Marvin Preston next day. So I went to Mavin and says I was goin' to arrest his old man because I'd ketched him sellin' liquor, and Mavin, he begged me I shouldn't. I told him the old man would git ten year, anyhow."

"What did Mavin say to that?"

"He jest bowed his head and kind of leaned against the stall."

"Then what?"

"I let on I needed money, and told him if he'd gimme two hundred dollars I'd destroy the evidence and let the old man go. He says he didn't have the money, and I says he had the organ money. He didn't say nothin' for a spell, and then he says, kind of low and wonderin', 'Which 'u'd be the worst—which 'u'd be the worst?' Then I says, 'Worst what?' And he says for his father to be ketched for a bootlegger or for him to be a thief. I jest let him think about it, and didn't say nothin', because I knowed how he looked up to his old man.

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"PRETTY soon, he says, 'I'd be a thief, 'cause I couldn't explain. I'd have to run off and leave Mattie, that I'm a-goin' to marry tomorrer. I could pay it back, but that wouldn't do no good. But for father to be arrested, him an elder and all, would kill him. I couldn't bear for father to be shamed 'fore all the world or to be thought guilty of sich a thing. He's wuth a heap more'n I be, and he won't never do it ag'in.' Then he asks if I'll give a letter to his old man, and I says yes. He walked up and down for maybe a quarter of an hour, talkin' to himself and kind of fightin' it out, but I knowed what he'd do right along. At the end he come over and says: 'This here means ruinin' my life and breakin' Mattie's heart, but I calc'late that's better'n holdin' father up to scorn and seein' him in jail. If they was only some other way.' His voice was stiddy-like, but he was right pale, and his eyes was a-shinin'. I remember how they was a-shinin'. 'I calc'late,' he says, 'that I kin bear it fer father's sake.' Then he says to me, kind of fierce, 'If ever you let on to anybody why I done this, if it's in a hundred years, I'll come back and kill you.' For a while he kept still again, and then he went in the house and got the money and wrote a letter to his old man, and I promised to give it to him—but I tore it up."

"What did the letter say?"

"It just said somethin' to the effect that he was willin' to do what he done if his old man would give over breakin' the law and go to livin' upright, like he always done, and that he hoped maybe God seen a different e in stealin' on account of the reasons folks had for doin' it. But if God didn't make no difference, why, he'd rather bear it than have it fall on His old man."

"And then?"

"I took the money and come away. And he run away. And that's all."

The town hall was very still. The stillness of it seemed to pierce and hurt. Then it was broken by a cry—a hoarse cry, wrenched from the soul of a man. "My boy—my boy!" Old Elder Newton was on his feet, tottering toward his son, and before his son he sank upon his knees and buried his hard, weathered old face upon Mavin's knees.

Justice of the Peace Bender cleared his throat.

"This here," he said, "looks to me to be suthin' the folks of this town, the friends and neighbors of this new father and son, ought to settle, instid of the law. Maybe it hain't legel, but I dunno who's to interfere. Folks, what ought to be done to this here boy that done a crime and suffered the consequences of it jest to save his father from another crime the old man never done a-tall "

Neither Mavin nor his father heard. The old elder was muttering over and over, "My boy—that was dead and is alive again!"

Scattergood arose silently and pointed to the door, and the crowd withdrew silently—withdrew to group about the entrance outside and to wait. They were patient. It was an hour before Elder Newton descended, his son on one side and Mattie Strong on the other. The band, with a volunter drummer, lifted its joyous voice. And, looking up, the trio faced a banner upon which Scattergood had caused to be painted, "Welcome home, Mavin Newton."

Coldriver had taken judicial action and thus voiced its decision.

"MARVIN NEWTON, I ARREST YE IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!"

HE TOOK A SAVAGE PLEASURE IN THUS MAKING HIMSELF CONSPICUOUS, KNOWING WELL HOW HIS CONDUCT WOULD BE DISCUSSED.

Curious Ways of Certain Trees

TREES that have their own individual methods of reproduction are interesting. The way of the elm is one of the most remarkable, since the elm actually makes hedges, and in a very accommodating way, too, especially in England, where it is the custom to border trees and roads with hedges.

The habit of the elm is to send out its roots in every direction and then to push up suckers from its spreading roots. When an elm seeds itself it is planted in a hedgerow in England and becomes established there; it sends out its roots and pushes up suckers on all sides of it, but, except on two sides, the young suckers get killed; they are trodden down in the path or cut up by the plow or gnawed down by grazing animals.

But they flourish on each side of the elm in the direction in which the hedge runs, and they kill out the other trees in the hedge until at last possibly the hedge is all elm. Then if the hedge is not cut or only partly cut, the strongest suckers grow up and become trees themselves and carry on the process.

Other trees, instead of being killed by animals, get helped and planted. Squirrels carrying off hazelnuts and burying them for private consumption later frequently forget where they have put them and so plant countless hazels every year.

Trees with berries, such as hollies, are found almost everywhere. The berries are carried, half swallowed, by the birds in various directions, and they are ultimately disgorged. Now, birds do not really like tree berries and will not eat them when they can get other berries or when the weather is warm and open. The result is that in a mild winter comparatively few holly berries can be eaten and sown. From the trees' point of view there must be good and bad seasons as regards the sowing or planting.

But the tree which occasionally gets itself propogated in the most interesting way is the elder. A naturalist, Hudson, has told delightfully the life story of some elders he noticed growing on a Wiltshire down. There was a small group of them set among some rabbit burrows, and a local farmer told how they came there. First, the rabbits, finding that the hill had softer chalk at that spot, had made burrows. Then some wheatears came and nested in and lived about the burrows. The wheatears fed up on the down and so brought the seeds to the burrows, where they rooted in the soft ground and soon established a flourishing thicket.

Monocle Disappears.

WHERE is the monacle of yesteryear? Even the Englishman has dropped it. Eyeglasses and spectacles have multiplied, but the monocle has seen its day.

The monocle played its shining part in certain elements of English society. It had quite a vogue and then its popularity waned. Toward the end of the first quarter of the nineteenth century the fad of wearing a monocle had become so popular that a writer on a book on the care of the eyes and preservation of the vision inveighed against it. The name of that writer was Dr. Kitchiner and in 1823 he published a book, the title of which was "Economy of the Eyes." Among many references to the monocle he wrote: "A single glass, set in a smart ring, is often used by trinket-fanciers for fashion's sake. These folks have not the least defect in their sight and are not aware of the mischievous consequences of such irritation."

It has been said that the English army authorities once issued an order that officers should not wear eyeglasses or spectacles, these being considered evidence of defective sight. A number of army officers then took to wearing the monocle, disobeying the army order by a safe margin and giving to themselves, as it was thought at the time, an air of distinction, the thought being something like that which prompted so many officers and enlisted men to carry a short cane which came to be called a "swagger stick."

One of the interesting things written about the monocle is that the fashion of wearing it was introduced at the congress of Vienna—that congress which remade the map of Europe back in the last century. Sir Horace Rumbold has written that it was a Dutch exquisite, one Jonkheer Breele, who was the first man to wear a monocle and showed the then brand-new fad to the diplomats and their followers assembled at Vienna. After that introduction the fad spread to all parts of Europe, but took its strongest hold on the English.